DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 005 CE 084 334

AUTHOR	Hannan, Mary, Ed.; Kicenko, Jan, Ed.
TITLE	Facilitator's Guide To Run a Learning Circle.
INSTITUTION	Adult Learning Australia, Inc., Jamison.
ISBN	ISBN-09-49145246
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	28p.; Adapted from materials used by the Learning and Living in the Third Age Project Team a project of Learning Circles Australia.
AVAILABLE FROM	Adult Learning Australia, PO Box 308, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614 ($12.50 Australian). E-mail: info@ala.asn.au; Web site: http://www.ala.asn.au.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Learner (051)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Active Learning; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Cooperative Learning; Foreign Countries; *Group Dynamics; Independent Study; Instructional Materials; *Lifelong Learning; *Nonformal Education; Participative Decision Making; *Self Directed Groups; Self Management; Small Group Instruction; Trainers; Training
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; *Facilitators; *Learning Circles

ABSTRACT

This do-it-yourself booklet is designed to help those who want to facilitate a Learning Circle but who cannot attend a training workshop. The booklet explains what a learning circle is; the principles of a learning circle; the difference among learning circles, discussion groups, and structured classes; why the learning circle methodology should be used; and the importance of lifelong learning. Facilitator guidelines and tips follow. They are arranged by these topics: working with a learning circle or small group; rationale for small group learning; size for effective group learning and/or discussion; characteristics of a learning circle or small group; managing a learning circle or small group; stimulus materials; problems that can occur in learning circles; and organization. A suggested Facilitator Training Session is set out that should take approximately two hours. Times are given for each section, and reference is made to various sheets that are included as a resource for the Training Session. The sheets may be used as overheads or handouts for participants. The sections are introduction/outline the session, learning circle discussion, small group dynamics, what adult learning is, facilitator's role, run a learning circle, and summary/evaluation of the session. A timeline for the training session precedes the resource sheets. (YLB)

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FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO RUN A LEARNING CIRCLE

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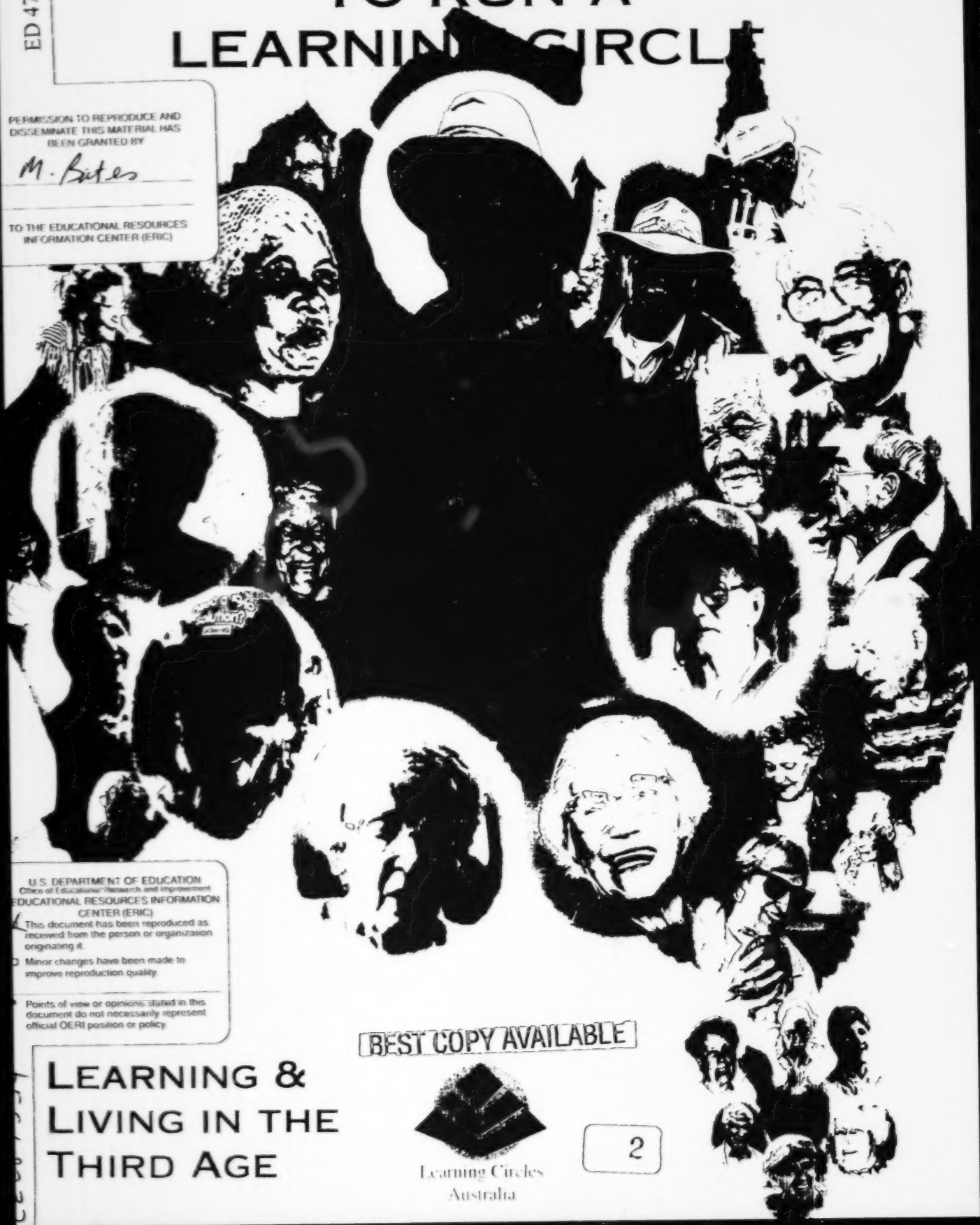

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LEARNING & LIVING IN THE THIRD AGE

Learning Circles Australia

2

A do-it-yourself booklet for learning circle facilitators.

Adapted from a range of materials used by the Learning and Living in the Third Age Project Team - a project of Learning Circles Australia (a program of ALA)

Thanks to
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ARBN 074 892 005
ABN 78 533 061672

ISBN: 09 49145246

Edited by : Mary Hannan and Jan Kicenko

Typesetting and Printing: Panther Publishing and Printing

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO RUNNING A LEARNING CIRCLE

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

Learning Circles
Australia

INTRODUCTION

This do-it-yourself booklet is to help those people who want to facilitate a Learning Circle but who cannot attend a Training Workshop.

Research shows that people who undertake training of some kind in ways to manage small groups are better equipped to handle any problems (should they arise) and the cohesion of the Learning Circle is further enhanced, thus ensuring that the group not only stays together but broadens its knowledge-base and provides greater confidence for its participants.

This booklet forms part of the "Learning and Living in the Third Age" Project which produced Discussion Guides for Older Australians. However the material contained in this booklet could be adapted for other learning circle projects.

People are encouraged to use this booklet for Facilitator Training if they are unable to attend any of the training sessions organised by Learning Circles Australia. It is impossible to get to all groups around Australia for training and it is hoped that this booklet will in some way assist those who undertake the role of the Facilitator in a Learning Circle.

Before setting out Guidelines and Tips for Facilitators an explanation of what a Learning Circle is and some of the most frequently asked questions about Learning Circles is set out.

What is a learning circle?

A Learning Circle is a group of people who meet regularly to discuss and learn about issues that concern or interest them, their communities or the wider society. A group can be from five (5) to fifteen (15) people and they can meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly, generally for one (1) to three (3) hours.

A Learning Circle is a relaxed and informal way for people to come together to discuss issues in a non-threatening environment.

If you would still like further information regarding learning circles or study circles as they are called in America and Sweden, we suggest you obtain a copy of the 'ABC to Learning Circles' from Learning Circles Australia 02 625 198 89. The following web sites are interesting sites to visit:

Learning Circles Australia website:
http://circles.ala.asn.au

For information on Learning Circles outside of Australia:
http://www.att.com/education/lcguide/p.intro/a.intro.html

For a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) about study circles:
http://www.studycircles.org/pages/faq.html

What are the principles of a learning circle?

- Active learning.
- Self directed/self managed.
- Active participation.
- Action/change oriented.
- Critical appraisal.
- Reflective learning.
- Cooperative learning.
- Individual learning responsibilities.
- Role of resource material.
- No teacher/expert.
- Search of knowledge.
- Participatory research.

What is the difference between learning circles, discussion groups and structured classes?

- Learning Circles use material which has been researched and then read by the group prior to coming together to discuss the topic. Often the material comes in the form of a kit or folder.
- As the name suggests, a Learning "Circle" allows everyone to take an equal part in the discussion and have an equal standing.
- Learning Circles have been used in Australia and overseas to educate the community and facilitate informed discussion around topical issues.
- As a result of Learning Circles discussing topical issues, local action of some sort may be taken should the group wish.
- In some instances, learning circle topics have been developed into courses, ie a number of U3A groups have taken topics and done this. A number of groups have utilised larger Learning Circle Kits which have also been developed by Learning Circles Australia. These courses have been run over a set period of time, say six (6) weeks, at a designated place.

However, it must be remembered that learning circles can be held anywhere - in a person's lounge room; a community hall; a local library; a park or garden and most only take a couple of hours. The facilitator is NOT the expert and should not dominate the discussion.

Why use the learning circle methodology?

In modern western society, because of the highly competitive, rapidly changing marketplace, we often make hasty decisions. The Learning Circle methodology provides an opportunity to balance short and long term considerations by exploring our own personal goals with the goals of others. It also enables people to continue lifelong learning - an important strategy in relation to ageing.

Participants in a Learning Circle set their own objectives and focus on the issues that concern them.

The presence of a facilitator and accepted ground rules, ensures that each participant has an opportunity of expressing his/her ideas without fear of rejection.

Why is lifelong learning so important?

The main arguments for lifelong learning in the latter part of one's lifespan are:

- The opportunities provided to overcome loneliness and boredom;
- By raising the general quality of life, health is improved and probable life expectancy is lengthened;
- Alleviating or solving problems faced in retirement;
- The increased life satisfaction gained by the identification and satisfaction of personal needs and interests;
- The utilisation of the wisdom, experience and skills of older people to benefit the community;
- By helping people to help themselves, lifelong education provides the opportunity for older people to become less dependent on society;
- When the education is intergenerational (that is across generations) it is possible to assist younger people to overcome the problems encountered along the various stages of life's journey; and
- The opinion of the elderly themselves who are already enjoying lifelong learning.

In case you think the realisation that lifelong learning will assist in coping with ageing is a more recent phenomenon, read the two quotes below:

> *"people who engage in intellectual and social activity throughout life will be far better in coping with ageing that those who do not."*
>
> *"decline in ageing can be resisted by physical exercise, a good diet and intellectual activity."*

The first quote was by Plato, C400 BC while the second was by Cicero, C50 BC. (Bromley 1974 quoted in Dunne, 1991).

FACILITATOR GUIDELINES AND TIPS

This will be in the form of guidelines and tips for working with small groups. Included in this booklet is a suggested Facilitator Training Session, giving approximate times for each section. There will also be some information suitable for overheads or handouts.

The most important thing to remember about the role of the Facilitator is that the person is NOT the expert. All people in a Learning Circle are equal and take an equal part in the discussion. If people are worried about not getting the correct facts for the topic, it is advisable to invite an expert along to the discussion.

Working with a learning circle or small group

Many people believe that working in small groups is easy and that interaction just occurs, but unless you as the Facilitator understand group dynamics, you may find much of the intereaction is directionless, unproductive and unsatisfying.

This booklet aims to help Facilitators:

- identify factors which must be present for a Learning Circle to be effective
- list the important characteristics of a Learning Circle
- demonstrate management techniques to run an effective Learning Circle
- identify problems which can occur in a Learning Circle and strategies to attempt to manage the problem.

Why small group learning?

For the second half of the 20th Century, adult educationists have shown increasing interest in the education potential of the small group. The main importance of the strategy lies in the following factors.

Small groups can provide:

- an important social contact between peers and facilitators
- an opportunity to evaluate the success of your role as facilitator
- intellectual skills such as:-
  - reasoning
  - problem solving
  - acquisition of interpersonal skills.

Size for effective group learning and/or discussion

To set up a situation in which the participants can each play a significant part in structuring the discussion and the learning involved, the upper limit should be set at a size at which it is still possible for individuals to communicate and make decisions effectively - to form an effective face-to-face group. Learning Circles Australia suggests this be no more than fifteen (15). In fact, it is better to have two Learning Circle groups of eight (8) and seven (7) than one large one of fifteen (15).

The lower limit is set by the need for the group to contain sufficient differences in experience and understanding for meaningful learning to occur. Experience has suggested that a group of fewer than five (5) people will often not generate stimulating discussion nor a sufficiently involving learning process. A group of fifteen (15) or more will impose difficulties in communication and decision making.

Characteristics of a learning circle or small group

For Learning Circles and small groups to be effective, they must have:

- **Active participation**
  Discussion among all participants.
- **Face-to-face contact**
  Sitting in a circle to provide non-verbal as well as verbal communication.
- **Purposeful activity**
  Each session must have a purpose and develop in an orderly manner.
- **Preparation**
  Participants must have information or experience in order to have a meaningful dialogue.
- **An effective facilitator**
  To keep the group focussed and to oversee problems.
- **Structure**
  Sets purpose and budgets time. It is not meant to encourage inflexibility but to clarify purpose and tasks.

The advantages of small group learning are essentially that the participant is active and should be able to put forward ideas in a non-threatening situation. Points not fully understood can be quickly identified and reinforced. The process promotes opportunities for participants to hear new concepts expressed in a variety of forms, and this assists them in relating these concepts to their existing framework of ideas.

On the other hand, small group work can be time consuming, especially if the group is a communicative one - but a good facilitator can lessen this - and in any case it should be outweighed by the advantages gained.

Managing a learning circle of small group

The results gained from small group learning will, in most cases, be dependent on the experience and leadership of the facilitator. Small group learning is considerably more difficult to manage than a lecture because a closer account must be taken of the participants' behaviour, personalities and difficulties. In addition, because you, as facilitator, have passed over the control of the topic, and may not be the person directing the discussion, you must also have read the Discussion Guide on the topic more thoroughly.

Factors a facilitator will need to consider:

(1) The task of the group:
- must be clearly defined
- purpose
- ground rules
- preparation
- reading or other resource material required.

(2) Maintenance of the group:
- achieving a climate for discussion - open, supportive, trusting, non-threatening
- cooperative and not competitive
- adequate preparation by all members
- possible rotation of the role of facilitator.

T Sziremt & S Dyson in their training book, "*Greater Expectation*", YWCA, Australia, 1984, provide a checklist for the maintenance of small groups:

- Learn the participants' names
- Provide an atmosphere which encourages diversity of opinion
- Develop active listening skills
- Attempt to become non-judgmental and accepting
- Learn to become more comfortable with silences
- Observe the right of individuals to pass
- Allow everyone the opportunity to speak
- Encourage participants to respond honestly
- Ask clarifying questions and draw out options from the group
- Encourage group members to take responsibility for their own learning
- Encourage the group to draw conclusions from their activities and discussions
- Support participants as they try out new behaviors
- Encourage group members to evaluate their own participation and that of the group.

Stimulus materials

Sometimes you may require some sort of a stimulus to get discussion moving in a Learning Circle. The manner in which you get started is really only limited by your imagination and the specific objectives of what you are hoping to achieve.

Some examples of stimulus materials are:

- A trigger film or video
- An audio recording of an interview
- A participant's written report or project
- Observation of a role play
- Visual materials - photographs, slides, specimens, charts, etc
- A journal or newspaper article.

Problems which can occur in learning circles

- **People who won't contribute to the discussion**
  - analyse the cause - is it active avoidance, shyness, insecurity?
  - don't rush in too quickly
  - find a task for them that they might find comfortable doing
  - move on from an actual discussion to an activity
  - clarify the issue - a pause may diffuse the situation
  - provide them with an opportunity for success.
- **People who dominate the discussion**
  - limit the number of minutes for each member of the group to speak. Make this decision before commencing the discussion and then refer back to it if necessary
  - can speak to privately, offer opportunity for final comment but need for everyone to contribute. If the person really knows the subject, use as co-facilitator.
- **Non involvement of group**
  - use group techniques - individual pairs, three's, etc
  - clarify question, topic
  - review your method of preparation.
- **Minority discussion**
  - bring back on task
  - use alternate activity
  - speak to privately
  - lower your voice so that their voice is the dominate sound
  - move your position so that you are standing over them.
- **Open hostility**
  - private discussion
  - perhaps a misunderstanding of the original information or task
  - treat the other person with respect
  - listen until you "experience the other side" and reflect content, feelings and meanings
  - briefly state your own views, needs and feelings.
- **Derogatory (making a remark with intent to damage or discredit)**
  - stand behind or next to person
  - reflective listening

In a reflective response, the listener restates the feeling and/or content of what the speaker has said and does this in a way which demonstrates understanding. Reflective listening enhances communication because it helps the listener verify his/her understanding of what the speaker said.

- **Smelly**
  - speak to privately as quickly as possible. Don't ignore.
- **Clowning**
  - assess cause of behaviour - insecurity, threatened, etc
  - direct attention back to task
  - give them a responsible task, ie take notes.
- **Pessimistic comments (to take a gloomy view of things)**
  - ask person for a logical, constructive backup of their comment - it may be only a defence mechanism
  - accept the negative response and ask person for a positive comment
  - focus on something positive and optimistic, eg an example of a positive outcome from a similar situation
  - direct a question to them which begs a positive response.
- **Digression (to differ or turn the conversation away from the main topic)**
  - accept comment and subtly move back on track
  - ask group whether the comment was relevant
  - analyse why the comment was made - maybe a coffee break is needed
  - clarify task again
  - analyse comment - perhaps the person is trying to communicate something unsuccessfully or needs to get something off their chest.
- **Rejection of content**
  - diffuse situation by asking someone else for an opinion
  - ask them for an alternative solution or suggestion
  - ask them to state why they reject the content.
- **Hair-splitting (the act of making petty or unnecessary distinctions or comparisons)**
  - redefine task
  - form a sub-group
  - direct people back to the agenda
  - use comments such as "perhaps you would like to investigate the matter and report back to the next meeting".

It would be most unusual (and unlucky) for a facilitator to come across all these problems in a Learning Circle. Most Learning Circles do run smoothly provided the facilitator lays down the rules at the beginning of each session and all participants agree to abide by them.

Placing the cream laminated sheet "Checklist for Facilitators/ Coordinators" on the table before each discussion takes place and getting everyone to agree to a few basic rules will give the discussion some structure.

TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

It is important to set the ground rules at the beginning of the session.

Organisation

1. **Convene the group** - and send out pre-reading material. This is not as easy as it sounds as there are things to consider such as photocopying and the cost and how do you get a certain number of copies of the Discussion Guide to every member of the Learning Circle.

2. **Organise location** - including the venue, time and seating.

3. **Assist in establishing ground rules:**
   - Consider things such as:
     - ways of ensuring that all voices are heard
     - arrangements for smoking and tea breaks
     - a time limit on speaking
     - rules for mobile phones
     - respect the rights of others to have differing opinions
     - at all times ensure that you DO NOT become the expert
     - rotating the facilitator's role if the group wishes to do this
     - appointing a record keeper in the case of a group which makes the decision to take some action.

4. **Organise reports and other follow up submissions.**

5. **During Meetings:**
   - Encourage people to put forward their ideas.
   - View differences as good and desirable and permit confrontation.
   - Tolerate ambiguity (having two or more possible meanings).
   - Encourage openness rather than concealment of the self.
   - Encourage people to trust in themselves as well as external resources.
   - Allow people to feel that they are respected and accepted.
   - Learn the participants' names.
   - Provide an atmosphere which encourages diversity of opinion.
   - Develop active listening skills.
   - Attempt to become non-judgmental and accepting.

- Learn to become more comfortable with silences.
- Observe the right of individuals to pass.
- Allow everyone the opportunity to speak.
- Encourage participants to respond honestly.
- Ask clarifying questions (to make things clear) and draw out options from the group.
- Encourage group members to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Encourage the group to draw conclusions from their activities and discussions.
- Keep the group focussed. (Your role will be to keep the discussion focussed and moving along. The participants' role is to share their concerns and beliefs, and to listen carefully to others and then examine those beliefs in light of what has been said.)
- Ensure that the conflict is on content and not personal.
- Summarise the discussion.

In Summary:

(1) Get discussion started
Stimulus.
What is present situation? Draw response.

(2) Keep a track of ideas
Record brief phrases on notepad.
Recorders summarise main paints on Flip Chart (if necessary).

(3) Keep the discussion flowing
Repeat question.
Reword or rephrase if necessary.
Keep on track.

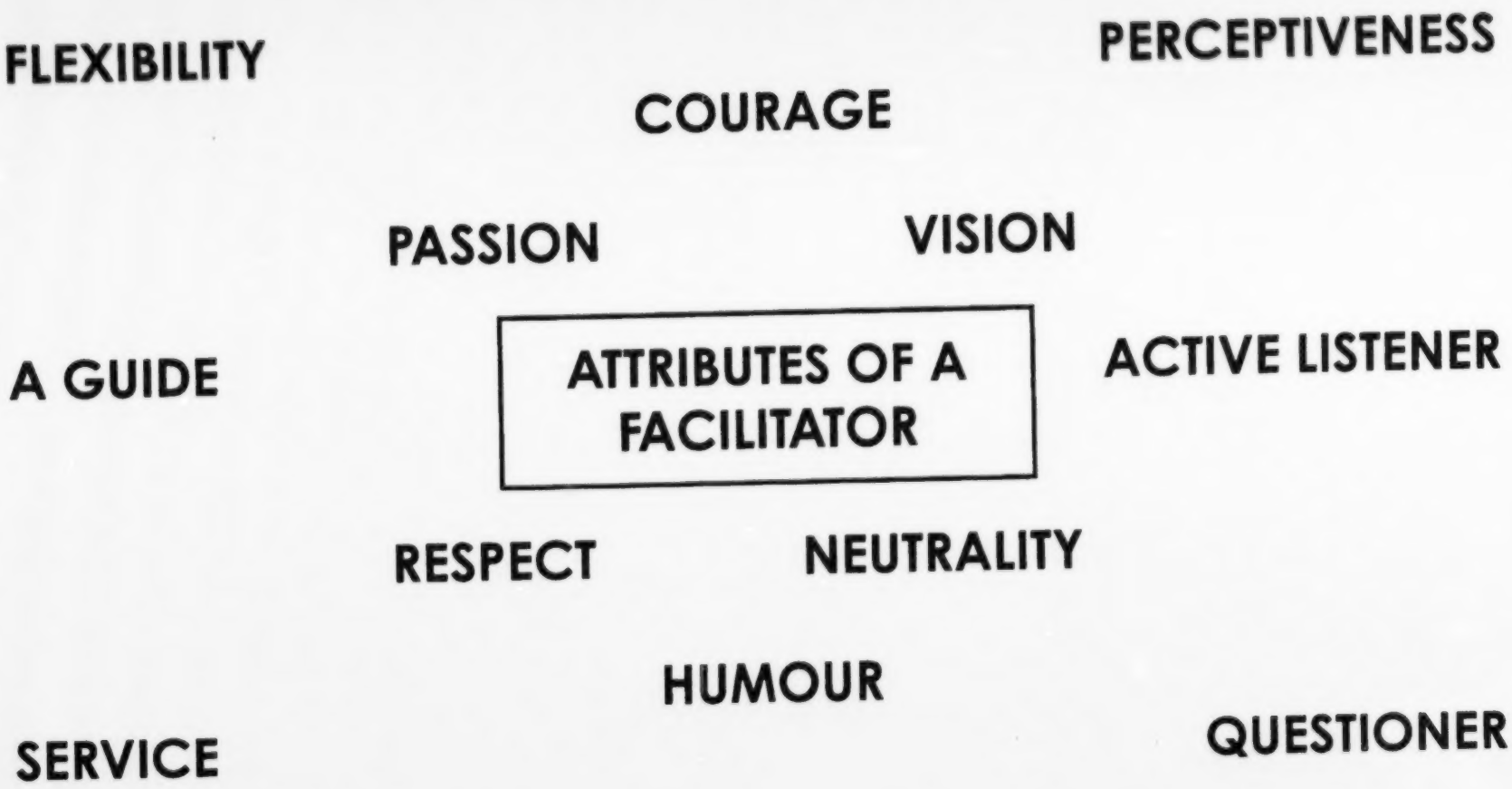
(4) Maintain focus
Recap what has been said to date.

(5) Keep the discussion practical
If an abstract or unclear comment, ask for an example from their own experience.

(6) Resolve disagreements
No need to - but you must be neutral.
If someone disagrees, find out what they think.

(7) Bring to a close and debrief
Review, identifying key points.
How will we use the results?
Problem solving to decide on specific action plans.
Ask people what they got out of the discussion.
When is the Learning Circle next going to meet?
What topic will be discussed?

The following sheet shows some of the attributes required by anyone who takes on the role of Facilitator of a Learning Circle.


FLEXIBILITY
PERCEPTIVENESS
COURAGE
PASSION
VISION
A GUIDE
ATTRIBUTES OF A FACILITATOR
ACTIVE LISTENER
RESPECT
NEUTRALITY
HUMOUR
SERVICE
QUESTIONER

FACILITATOR TRAINING SESSION

The following pages set out a Facilitator Training Session which should take approximately two (2) hours. Times are given for each section and reference will be made to various sheets which are included as a resource for the Training Session. You may wish to use the sheets as overheads or hand copies out to participants.

APPROXIMATE TIME - TWO (2) HOURS

1 Introduction/outline the session

Group will discuss:

1 Learning Circle Discussion
2 Adult Learning Principles
3 Small group dynamics
4 Facilitator's role
5 Run a Learning Circle
6 Summary/Evaluation of Session - did it work.

(10 minutes)

This next part will be for as long as it takes for everyone in the group to get to know each other and each others names. The people may have already met, however, use good strategies to put participants at ease. An effort must be made to learn the names of all the participants. Using name tags is not enough. Talk to your neighbour - introduce each other - use name association, eg Christmas Carol, Daring Dan, Smiling Sue, etc.

2 Learning circle discussion

* Refer to Sheet No 1 (Learning Circle Principles).
* Problems which can occur in Learning Circles. Refer to Sheet No 2 (Problems Which Can Occur in Learning Circles).
* What is the difference between a Learning Circle and a Discussion Group? Refer to Sheet No 3 (Differences Between Learning Circles and Discussion Groups).
* Learning Circles are resourced: Kits.
* "Circle" as name suggests - everyone takes equal part/ equal standing.

- History of study circles, (eg Sweden) to educate the community and facilitate informed discussion around topical issues (refer to website addresses provided).
- Often lead to some local action of some sort.

(10 minutes)

3 Small group dynamics

- Refer to Sheet No 2 (Characteristics of a Learning Circle) – group to discuss.

(10 minutes)

4 What is adult learning?

- Refer to Sheet No 5 (Adult Learning Principles).
- Discuss Adult Learning Principles.
- Ingredients necessary for groups to be successful emphasis:
  - leadership
  - preparation
  - active participation
  - objective or purpose.

(10 minutes)

5 Facilitator's role

- Refer to Sheet No 7 (Tips for Facilitators, Checklist for Facilitators).
- Refer to Sheet No 8 (Attributes of a Facilitator)

(10 minutes)

6 Run a learning circle

(Plastic shopping bags are recommended)

- Use questions on Sheet No 9 or if you have time, go through the questions contained in the Learning Circle Guide.

(45 minutes)

7 Summary/evaluation of the session

What were the key points for the facilitator?

* Get discussion started
* Keep a track of ideas
* Keep the discussion flowing
* Maintain focus
* Keep the discussion practical
* Resolve disagreements
* Should any points be followed up?
* Is further research required on the topic?
* Evaluation of the training session:
  - What did people think of the training session?
  - Discuss the dynamics of the session?
  - What was missing?
  - What action could be taken?
* Bring to a close.

Thank everyone for attending.
(15 minutes)

TIMELINE FOR TRAINING SESSION

1	Introduction	10 minutes
2	Learning Circle Discussion	10 minutes
3	Small Group Dynamics	10 minutes
4	Adult Learning Principles	10 minutes
5	Facilitator's role	10 minutes
6	Run a Learning Circle	45 minutes
7	Summary/Evaluation	15 minutes
	Total	1 hour 50 minutes

This is a Facilitator Training which Learning Circles Australia has used.
It is not necessary to follow this item by item.
People may wish to develop some of the aspects themselves.

LEARNING CIRCLE DISCUSSION

- Active learning.
- Self-directed/self managed.
- Active participation.
- Action/change oriented.
- Critical appraisal.
- Reflective learning.
- Cooperative learning.
- Individual learning responsibilities.
- Role of resource material.
- No teacher/expert.
- Search of knowledge.
- Participatory research.

PROBLEMS WHICH CAN OCCUR IN LEARNING CIRCLES

* People who won't contribute to the discussion.
* People who dominate the discussion.
* Non-involvement of group.
* Minority discussion.
* Open hostility.
* Derogatory.
* Smelly.
* Clowning.
* Pessimistic comments.
* Digression.
* Rejection of content.
* Hair-splitting.

Many people believe that working in small groups is easy, but unless you as the facilitator understand group dynamics, you may find much of the interaction is directionless, unproductive and unsatisfying.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEARNING CIRCLES AND DISCUSSION GROUPS

- Learning Circles are resourced: Discussion Guides.
- "Circle" as name suggests - everyone takes equal part/equal standing.
- History of study circles, eg Sweden, to educate community and facilitate informed discussion around topical issues.
- Often lead to some local action of some sort.

SUMMARISING

A group of people is sitting around a table, a meeting room or a friend's lounge room. As one is speaking, someone else is jotting down notes, several others are waiting to make points, another is skimming through the readings, a facilitator is watching the whole group and the rest are listening quietly.

This is a learning circle in discussion mode.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SMALL GROUP/LEARNING CIRCLE

For small groups/learning circles to be effective, they must have:-

* Active participation
* Face-to-face contact
* Purposeful activity
* Preparation
* Effective Leadership
* Structure.

The advantages of learning in small groups:-

- The learner is active and should be able to put forward ideas in a non-threatening situation.
- The process promotes opportunities for participants to hear new concepts expressed in a variety of forms.

ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES

1 **ACTIVE LEARNING** - People learn more quickly and effectively if they are involved in the learning process.

2 **MAKING LEARNING MEANINGFUL FOR PEOPLE** - People learn more effectively when they can relate new material to their existing knowledge and their daily lives.

3 **MULTI-SENSORY LEARNING** - Learning methods that use all the senses (touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell).

4 **KINETIC** - (of or relating to motion) - visual/verbal/kinetic (doing).

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

ORGANISATION

It is important to set the ground rules at the beginning of each session.

- **Convene the group** - and send out pre-reading material.
- **Organise location** - both venue, time and seating.
- **Assist in establishing ground rules**:-
  You could consider things such as:-
  * ways of ensuring that all voices are heard.
  * arrangements for smoking and tea breaks.
  * a time limit on speaking.
  * rules for mobile phones.
  * respect the rights of others to have differing opinions.

At all times ensure that you **DO NOT** become the expert. You are a member of the Learning Circle.
You may rotate the Facilitator's Role if you wish.

CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATORS OR CO-ORDINATORS

1 Ensure everyone has the reading material and other resources they need. Set a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Use the first few minutes to decide which activities the meeting will focus on.

2 Listen carefully to what people are saying so you can help guide the discussion.

3 Discourage the group from treating you as "The Expert".

4 Try to stay impartial when there are disagreements. Your role is to further the discussion by drawing out the different viewpoints.

5 Don't avoid conflict, but don't let it get personal. Criticize the idea, not the person. People must feel safe about expressing their views even if they are unpopular.

6 Discourage aggressive or over-talkative people from dominating by saying: "Let's go round and see what other people think".

7 Draw out the quiet people.

8 Don't let the group get stuck on unprovable 'facts' or assertions. You could ask someone to find more information for the next session.

9 Don't be afraid of pauses and silences - it probably means that people are thinking.

10 Summarize from time to time, then move on. Don't get stuck on a topic.

11 You can ask 'hard' questions which people might be ignoring and try to use questions which encourage discussion.

12 Close the session with a brief question that each person can answer in turn. This helps to give the session a sense of closure.

FLEXIBILITY

PERCEPTIVENESS

COURAGE

PASSION

VISION

ATTRIBUTES OF A FACILITATOR

A GUIDE

ACTIVE LISTENER

RESPECT

NEUTRALITY

HUMOUR

SERVICE

QUESTIONER

SHEET NO 8

PLASTIC BAGS

Some questions you could use for the topic "Plastic Shopping Bags":-

- How often do you use plastic bags?
- What do you do with them after use?
- Do you ever say "no plastic bags thanks" to a shop assistant?
- Do you see plastic bags as a problem in your local environment?
- What did you do before plastic bags were so readily available?

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Title: FACILITATORS GUIDE TO RUN A LEARNING CIRCLE

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Corporate Source: ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA

Publication Date:

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